

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 18, 2018

The Honorable John W. Henderson
Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for
Installations, Environment and Energy
1665 Air Force Pentagon
Washington, DC 20330

The Honorable Lucian Niemeyer
Assistant Secretary of Defense for
Energy, Installations and Environment
3400 Defense Pentagon, Room 5C646
Washington, DC 20301-3400

Assistant Secretary Henderson and Assistant Secretary Niemeyer:

Residents living near former Wurtsmith Air Force base (Wurtsmith) have had their groundwater and surface water contaminated by per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) from the use of aqueous film forming foam (AFFF) by the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD). We ask that the DOD use this year's funding to prioritize stopping additional contamination of groundwater and surface water coming from Wurtsmith.

Exposure to PFAS has been linked to cancer as well as thyroid, kidney, liver, heart and reproductive problems. In the Fiscal Year 2018 Consolidated Appropriations Act, Congress increased funding for environmental remediation at BRAC bases by \$54 million, increasing the program to \$310 million. In the accompanying committee report, it states specifically that the Secretary of the Air Force should prioritize clean up at PFAS contaminated sites. While we recognize there is a significant backlog of environmental remediation projects, the DOD should focus its funding on sites, such as Oscoda, Mich., that Congress intended.

In 2016, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) established new lifetime health advisories for two types of PFAS—perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and perfluorooctanesulfonic acid (PFOS). In addition, pursuant to state law¹, the state of Michigan's cleanup criteria for groundwater for the protection of drinking water was established January 10, 2018. Furthermore, the state of Michigan has water quality standards which apply to surface waters, and also to groundwater venting to surface waters. Michigan regulations² specify that water quality standards shall be met in *all* waters of the state. The DOD must comply with Michigan's water quality standards and cleanup criteria, and must stop the movement of contamination from the former base into groundwater and surface waters near Wurtsmith.

The DOD is currently installing granulated activated carbon (GAC) filter systems in two locations where water is treated and returned to surface waters. However, according to extensive sampling conducted by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ), there is still a significant volume of PFAS contamination in the groundwater on the former base and

¹ Part 201, Environmental Remediation, of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, 1994 PA 451, as amended.

² Part 4 Rules, Water Quality Standards (of Part 31, Water Resources Protection, of Act 451 of 1994)

flowing off-base in groundwater and entering surface water. Additional treatment of the contaminated groundwater, including additional GAC filter systems, is needed. The DOD should purchase and install additional GAC filter systems to treat the groundwater and ensure it is complying with Michigan's laws to prevent further contamination from Wurtsmith.

The MDEQ estimates that in 2018 alone, \$36 million must be spent on remediation at Wurtsmith. Of that money, \$33 million is needed to fund six treatment systems that withdraw contaminated groundwater, treat it using GAC filter systems to remove PFAS, and reinject treated water into the aquifer or discharge to surface water. All six GAC systems would treat the plume that directly contaminates Van Etten Lake in Oscoda near Wurtsmith. One of the six GAC systems would also treat a portion of the plume impacting a children's YMCA camp on the lake.

In addition, \$3 million would be used for expansion of a currently planned Air Force treatment system to allow for increased volume of contaminated groundwater to be treated.

Overall, to completely remediate the PFAS contamination at Wurtsmith, the MDEQ estimates it will cost at least \$180 million.

Frequently, we hear concerns from community leaders in Oscoda regarding the contamination's negative impact on the community's economy and housing market. The local tourist industry is losing business because people are afraid of being exposed to PFAS while companies are having difficulty attracting talent for jobs due to concern with safety of the water.

The community of Oscoda had this contamination done to them – it was not the local community's fault. The residents of Oscoda have already suffered through the closure of Wurtsmith, they should not continue to suffer from the DOD's actions. Thus, the DOD must immediately direct funds to stop further contamination of the groundwater and surface water.

Sincerely,



Daniel T. Kildee
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Gary C. Peters
U.S. Senator

Debbie Stabenow
U.S. Senator